

Management Response

Mid-Term Evaluation of the UNICEF 'Improving WASH facilities in prioritized schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (2012-2014)' Project

May 2015

The Mid-Term Evaluation of the UNICEF 'Improving WASH facilities in prioritized schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (2012-2014)' project was commissioned by UNICEF and independently conducted by Alpha International for Research, Polling and Informatics in February – March 2014. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) contributed to the terms of reference for the Evaluation and thanks the consultants for delivering a sound product. DFAT notes that UNICEF has accepted and is acting on the recommendations of the Evaluation.

DFAT welcomes the Evaluation's favourable assessment of the project, particularly given the constraints and challenges to implementing assistance in the Palestinian Territories. The Evaluation found the project was contributing to its goal of a safer and healthier learning environment in Government schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and performed well against most areas of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The Evaluation assessed the project as highly relevant and a priority for targeted communities (students and school staff) and stakeholders. The construction and rehabilitation of WASH facilities and water tankering to vulnerable schools have improved students' access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene. These aspects of the project recorded a high level of satisfaction amongst beneficiaries.

The evaluation found the project's integrated approach and its fostering of partnerships between communities and the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education to be efficient. Other aspects such as the data used for needs assessments, the duration and quality of some construction work, and hygiene promotion in schools needed attention.

A significant objective of the project is to support improved enrolment and attendance rates in targeted schools, especially amongst girls. The project prioritises co-education and girls' schools so that at least 50 per cent of beneficiaries are female. However, the Evaluation's surveys showed that because facilities in boys' schools are generally poorer, the WASH upgrades resulted in more pronounced outcomes for boys. Enrolment rates in the Palestinian Territories are already high, and a clear link between WASH interventions and increased attendance rates is yet to be determined. The Evaluation notes that UNICEF is working with the Palestinian Authority to improve the collection of attendance data to determine if this link can be established.

The Evaluation made recommendations relating to: minimising disturbances to schooling caused by infrastructure works; making the contracting process shorter and reinforcing contractors' accountability; maintenance and sustainability planning for the facilities by the Ministry and schools, and inculcating long-term, hygiene behaviour change amongst students and teachers.

DFAT notes that UNICEF has accepted all recommendations and, in conjunction with the Ministry, taken action to implement them. This action includes: more comprehensive needs assessments; a pre-qualification selection process for contractors to reduce delays; closer

monitoring of construction; introduction of a hygiene manual for use in all schools and outreach with communities to promote hygiene behaviour change.